DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 362 805 CG 025 066

AUTHOR Carter, Celeste M.; And Others
TITLE Are You Suited for the Job?
PUB DATE Mar 93
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (39th, Atlanta, GA, March 24-27, 1993).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Clothing; *Color; Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; *Employment Interviews; *Job Applicants; *Personnel Selection; Police; Sex Differences

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to examine the impact of different color women's business suits on hiring decisions and perceptions of job applicants for two different types of jobs, one requiring warmth (elementary school teacher) and one requiring power (police officer). It was hypothesized that fictitious job applicants wearing dark, cold colors would be perceived as more appropriate for a job requiring power, and that fictitious job applicants wearing lighter, warm colors would be judged as more suitable for a job requiring warmth and compassion. Subjects (N=76) were randomly assigned into groups following a 2 (subject sex) x 2 (job type) x 5 (suit color) mixed design. Subjects were given a description of one of the jobs and were told to make evaluations of women's business clothing for a female candidate. The results indicated that both clothing color and type of job sought influenced perceptions of the hirability and traits of job candidates. Black and red suits positively influenced hirability and were seen as more appropriate than teal, pink, or green suits. If the job sought required warmth, however, suits that favorably influenced hiring were red, teal, and pink. Dark suit colors (red and black) were perceived to make the job applicant seem powerful and competent. Lighter pastels (pink and teal) increased perceptions of warmth when compared to black, although the red suit also was seen as warm. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 362 805

Are You Suited for the Job?

Celeste M. Carter, Sheila Brownlow, and Kim Goodwin

Catawba College

Running Head: JOB AND SUIT EFFECTS

Poster presented through the Committee on Equality in Professional Opportunity at the 39th annual meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, Atlanta, GA. We express our gratitude to Jane Copley for her assistance with the data analysis and comments on the paper. Address correspondence to the second author at the Department of Psychology, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC 28144.

CG025066

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Brownlow

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Rationale:

Popular cultural beliefs, as well as research, support the notion that clothing style and color affects our perceptions of warmth, dominance, and competence of others. The consequences of such perceptions are paramount during the job interview (Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988), where clothing style influences beliefs about assertiveness and competence. For example, job applicants wearing masculine clothing, including jackets (Scherbaum & Shepherd, 1987), are more likely to be hired than applicants not wearing styles that convey dominance (Forsythe, 1990; Forsythe, Drake, & Cox, 1985).

In addition to clothing style, clothing color affects perceptions of job applicants. When job candidates wear dark colors--especially black--they are seen as more powerful (Jackson, 1983) and are perceived as more potent and competent (Damhourst & Reed, 1986). Both red and blue also favorably increase perceptions of ability (Francis & Evans, 1988; Scherbaum & Shepherd, 1987). One possible explanation for these perceptions may be that darker colors are seen as cold, evil, and hard, while lighter colors are associated with goodness (Frank & Gilovich, 1988). Black and red are viewed as strong and potent (Adams & Osgood, 1973), whereas pink is viewed as calm and passive (Profusek & Rainey, 1987). Such associative links of certain colors to judgments of the characteristics and abilities of those wearing those colors influence both expectations of behavior and actual behavior. For example, wearing black not only increases perceptions of malevolence and aggression, but those who wear black actually perform more aggressive behaviors than those who don't (Frank & Gilovich, 1988).

Although the effects of some clothing colors and masculine clothing styles on

hiring of job candidates is well-documented, research has not examined whether the appropriateness of clothing of different color is affected by the type of job for which one is applying. For example, some jobs require more warmth than other jobs, and thus a job candidate who is wearing clothing that conveys warmth rather than aggression may be perceived favorably. In addition, little attention has been paid to female job applicants' clothing on their hirability. The present study examined the impact of different color women's business suits on hiring decisions and perceptions of job applicants for two different types of jobs--one requiring warmth, the other power. It was hypothesized that fictitious job applicants wearing dark, cold colors would be perceived as more appropriate for a job requiring power, and that fictitious job applicants wearing lighter, warm colors would be judged as more suitable for a job requiring warmth and compassion.

Method:

Selection of stimulus materials. Two types of jobs were utilized for this experiment--police officer and elementary school teacher. These jobs were chosen because pretesting of 11 common job descriptions indicated that one was high in power but low in warmth (police officer) whereas the other was low in power but high in warmth (elementary school teacher), but both were equal in expertise. The description of the school teacher job called for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic to first graders, and the the description of the police officer job called for patrolling a local area high in crime in order to bust drug dealers.

Slides of five suits were made to show to subjects. The suits were of the exact same size, were depicted on a hanger against a neutral background, and were

basically unadorned and of solid colors black, red, teal, pink, and green.

Subjects. 76 subjects (36 males, 40 females) were randomly assigned into groups following a 2 (Subject Sex) X 2 (Job Type) X 5 (Suit Color) mixed design. In order to minimize the effects of perceptions of one color of suit on perceptions of other suit colors, subjects say suits in one of five orders, as determined by a Latin Square. To avoid contrast effects, subjects made judgments based on application for either the police office or school teacher job.

Procedure. Subjects were given a description of one the jobs, and were told to make evaluations of women's business clothing for a female candidate. The evaluations were made as each suit was presented the slides. Participants used 9-point bipolar scales to rate how likely they would be to hire a candidate wearing each suit, and how much expertise, power, and warmth a person wearing each suit would have. In order to minimize contrast effects, subjects rated all the suits on one dimension before going on to rate the suits on the next dimension.

After indicating their perceptions of someone wearing each suit, checks on the manipulations were collected. Subjects were told to think about the target job and indicate (on 9-point bipolar scales) how much expertise, power, and warmth was required of a job-holder in that field. Finally, a global rating of the stylishness of the suits was made.

Results:

Overview. Each dependent measure (hirability, warmth, power, expertise, and the manipulation checks) were separately entered as the dependent measure in 2 (Subject Sex) X 2 (Job Type) X 5 (Suit Color) ANOVAs with repeated measures on the

last factor. All post-hoc comparisons were made via Scheffé tests. The manipulations were successful as the elementary school teacher job was perceived as requiring more warmth but less power than the police officer job, both Fs (1, 72) $\geq$ 5.94, both ps $\leq$ .03, although both were considered to require an equal amount of expertise F (1, 72) < 1, ns. All suit colors were seen as equally stylish, F (1, 72) < 1, ns.

Sex Differences. A main effect for subject sex emerged in all four analyses, as females found the job candidate more hirable, powerful, warm, and expert than did male subjects, all Fs $\geq$ 4.19, all ps < .05.

Suit Color Effects. Suit color effects were found for each measure, all Fs (4, 288) $\geq$ 3.08, all ps $\leq$ .02. The effects of suit color on hirability, warmth, power, and expertise are depicted in Figure 1.

Hirability. The candidate was more likely to be hired when wearing a black (M =5.69) or red (M = 5.25) suit, and was more hirable when wearing black as compared to teal (M = 4.76), pink (M = 4.95), or green (M = 4.87), all ps < .05.

Power. The applicant was more powerful when wearing black (M = 6.82) and red (M = 6.38) than teal (M = 4.50), pink (M = 4.53), and green (M = 4.88), all ps < .005.

Warmth. The applicant was warmest when wearing pink (M = 7.15), then teal (M = 6.40), then red (M = 5.28) and green (M = 4.99), and finally black (M = 3.54), all ps < .05.

Expertise. The black (M = 6.12) and red (M = 5.86) suits positively impacted perceptions of expertise when compared with the teal (M = 4.93) and pink (M = 4.64) suits, all ps < .05. The interaction of job type and suit color on the job hiring measure achieved significance, F(4, 288) = 6.57, p < .001.

Effects of Job Type and Suit Color on Hiring Decisions. The applicant wearing the red, teal, or pink suit was seen as more hirable for the elementary school teacher job (*M*s = 5.83, 5.53, and 6.12, respectively) than for the police officer job (*M*s = 4.65, 3.98, and 3.78, respectively), $F(4, 288) = 6.57$, $p < .001$, perhaps because these suit colors were seen as the warmest, and the elementary school teacher job was seen as requiring warmth. This interaction is depicted in Figure 2.

Implications:

The results of this study indicated that both clothing color and type of job sought influence perceptions of the hirability and traits of job candidates. Black and red suits positively impacted hirability, and were both seen as more appropriate than teal, pink, or green suits. Not surprisingly, if the job sought was one that required warmth, then the suits that favorably influenced hiring were red, and the pastel colors of teal and pink. Replicating past research (cf. Adams & Osgood, 1973; Damhourst & Reed, 1986; Jackson, 1983), dark suit colors (red and black) were perceived to make the job candidate seem powerful and competent. As expected, lighter pastels (pink, teal) increased perceptions of warmth when compared to black, although the red suit was also seen as warm.

It is important to note that judgments of hiring were made based only on a suit, and that no actual women were portrayed in the experimental situation. Although this is a benefit for isolating the effects of suit colors alone, it is important that future work consider the impact of job type and suit color on hiring of real people in actual situations. It is also possible that differential liking of the suits due to color preference or suit attractiveness may have impacted judgments, and to address this possibility

data on the likability and attractiveness of each suit color is currently being collected.

Finally, the results of this research dispel the popular stereotype of importance of wearing the black "power suit" in that a red suit is perceived as both powerful and warm, and red and other lighter colors are seen as good choices when applying for jobs that require warmth. These findings shed some light on appropriate choices on clothing for job candidates, and provide information as to whether a woman is truly "suited for the job".

References

Adams, F.M., & Osgood, C.E. (1973). A cross-cultural study of the affective meaning of color. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 4, 135-156.

Damhourst, M., & Reed, A. (1987). Clothing color value and facial expression: Effects of evaluations of female job applicants. Social Behavior and Personality, 14, 89-98.

Forsythe, S. M. (1990). Effect of applicant's clothing interviewer's decision to hire. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 20, 1579-1595.

Forsythe, S. M., Drake, M., & Cox, C. (1985). Influence of applicants dress on interviewer's selection decisions. Journal of Applied Psychology, 70, 374-378.

Frank, M.G., & Gilovich, T. (1988). The dark side of self- and social perception: Black uniforms and aggression in professional sports. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54, 74-85.

Jackson, L. (1983). The influence of sex, physical attractiveness, sex role, and occupational sex-linkage on perception on occupational suitability. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 70, 374-378.

Profusek, P., & Rainey, D. (1987). Effects of Baker-Miller pink and red on state of anxiety, grip strength, and motor precision. Perceptual and Motor Skills, 65, 941-942.

Riggio, R., & Throckmorton, B. (1988). The relative effects of verbal and nonverbal behavior, appearance, and social skills on evaluations made in hiring interviews. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 18, 331-348.

Scherbaum, C., & Shepherd, D. (1990). Dressing for success: Effects of color and layering on perceptions of women in business. Sex Roles, 16, 391-399.

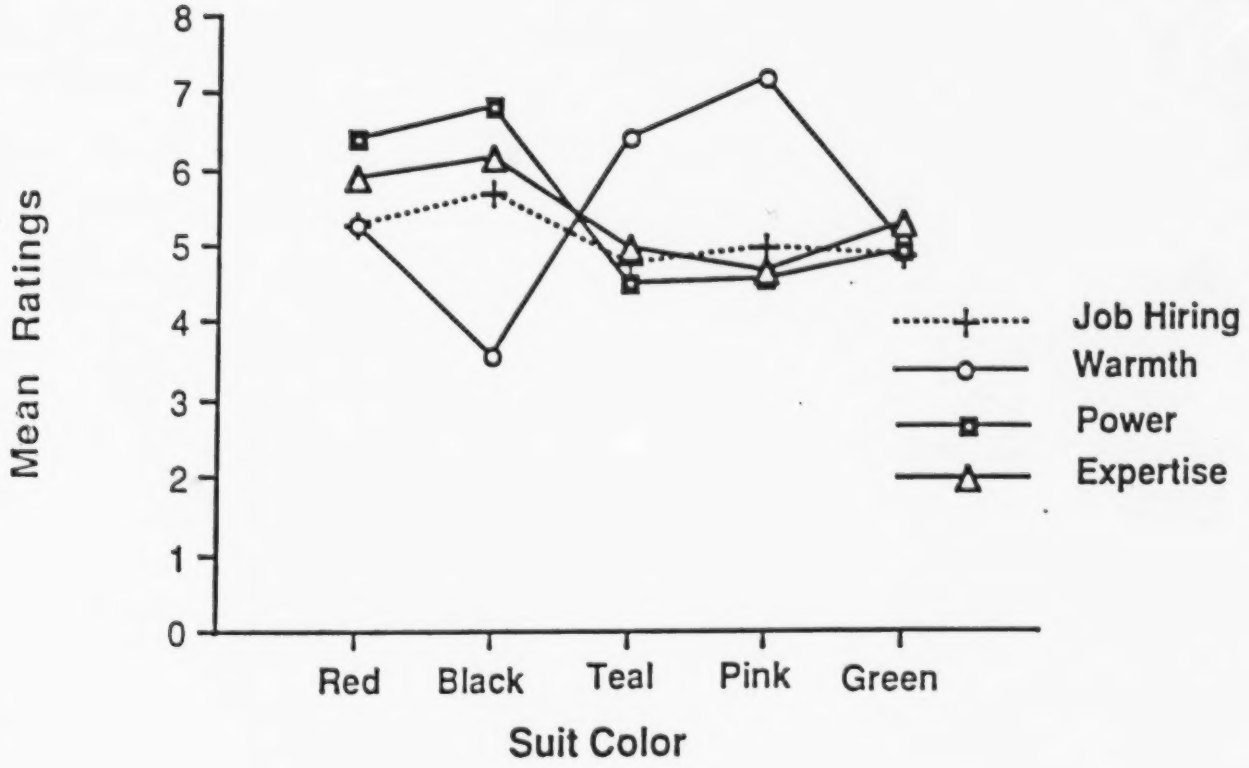

Figure 1. Perceptions of Warmth, Power, Expertise, and Hirability as a Function of Suit Color

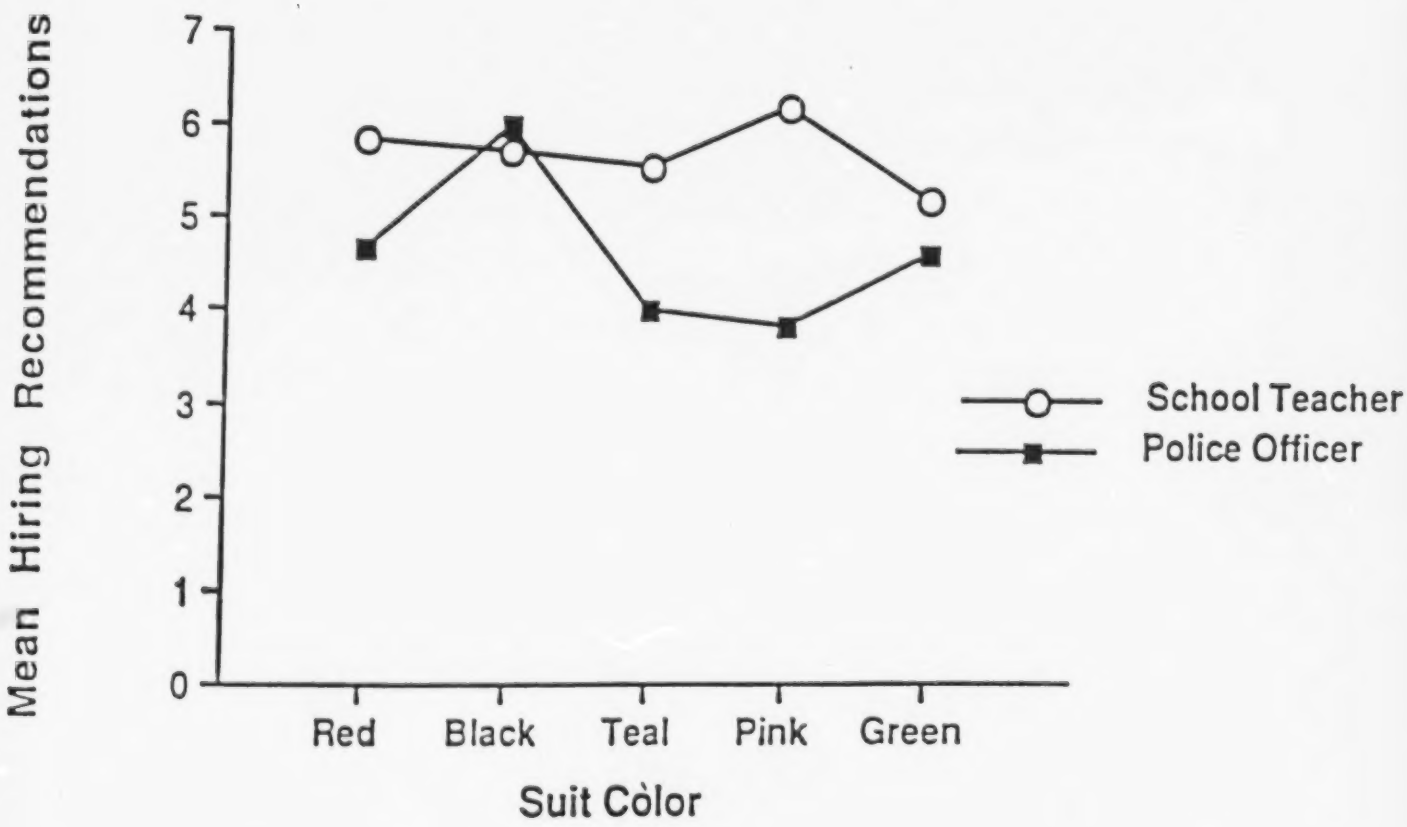

Figure 2. Hirability as a Function of Job Type and Suit Color